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Publication date:
2007

Document version
Early version, also known as pre-print

Citation for published version (APA):
Brands-Kehris, I., & Landes, X. (2007). *Multicultural Education in Latvia*. Latvian Centre for Human Rights.

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LATVIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

2007

EUROPEAN COMMISSION CITIZENS AND GOVERNANCE IN A KNOWLEDGE-BASED SOCIETY

EMILIE - A European approach to multicultural citizenship: Legal, political and educational challenges.
EMILIE is a three-year research project funded by the European Commission Research DG, Sixth Framework Programme (2006-2009).

EMILIE
A European Approach to Multicultural Citizenship.
Legal, Political and Educational Challenges

EMILIE examines the migration and integration experiences of nine EU Member States and attempts to respond to the so-called 'crisis of multiculturalism' currently affecting Europe. EMILIE studies the challenges posed by migration-related diversity in three important areas: Education; Discrimination in the workplace; Voting rights and civic participation, in Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Poland, Spain and the UK. EMILIE aims to track the relationship between post-immigration diversity and citizenship, i.e. multicultural citizenship, across these EU countries, and to identify what kind(s) of, if any, multicultural citizenship is emerging and whether there is/are distinctive European pattern(s). EMILIE Project Reports, Events and Research Briefs are available at http://emilie.eliamep.gr

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The Latvian Centre for Human Rights (LCHR) is an NGO based in Riga, Latvia. The LCHR was established in 1993 as an institution with a broad human rights agenda, with special focus on political and civic rights. Since the beginning, one of the main directions of LCHR work has been minority rights and the situation of national minorities in Latvia, but in the last decade, much attention has also been devoted to anti-discrimination, fundamental freedoms, and the situation with regards to intolerance and racism. LCHR applies a multi-disciplinary approach to its work, in which legal analysis combines with sociological and political science methods of research. The organisation staff members conduct research, produce reports and expert opinions, provide trainings and seminars, as well as legal consultations to victims of human rights violations. For more information, see www.humanrights.org.lv

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1. Introduction

This paper addresses issues related to multicultural education in Latvia. As in the topics of other work packages, the starting point of Latvia as a multiethnic state also brings with it a specific diversity-related context to schooling. No doubt, the most visible aspect of this educational policy-making since independence in Latvia has been concerns with special aspects of national minority as well as linguistic minority education. Over the years, much of the debate has focused on language and on bilingualism. But increasingly questions of the role of the minority schools and issues of accommodation of minority pupils in mainstream schools have also emerged. Diversity in schools and multicultural education have been addressed by non-state actors for quite a few years, but it is now slowly emerging on the official agenda, and there are attempts to explicitly start dealing with the adoption of multicultural and intercultural educational standards, programs, methods and curricula. Nevertheless, certain legacies from the former Soviet system, as well as the strong focus on minority education as part of coming to terms with national minority rights, it is found, in some ways hampers the rapid development of more contemporary approaches to multicultural education. Lack of exposure to ethnic and cultural diversity beyond the traditional minority groups in Latvia also entails that almost no attention has been paid to preparing schools, teachers, pupils and their parents for a future increase in diversity and the need to accommodate diverse claims for recognition and adaptation of the schooling environment.

The methodology used included a review of relevant literature, including studies, academic papers, official programmes, laws, regulatory acts, reports on diversity in textbooks, bilingual implementation, minority education in Latvia, etc. Public discourse on issues relating in some aspects to multicultural education were also taken into account when identifying the most topical issues. Then a set of questions were elaborated and 10 experts to be interviewed were identified (the list is included in the annex). The interviewed individuals included education policy-makers and officials with related responsibilities within the state institutions, as well as non-governmental and academic experts. A parliamentarian with specific expertise on minority rights was also included in the list. The interviews were conducted between June and August 2007 by Sigita Zankovska-Odiņa, Indra Strautiņa and Xavier Landes in both Latvian and English languages.

2. Situation and Contextual Background

2.1. Multicultural education

It is not the task of this paper to address the complexities of establishing a conceptual framework on multicultural education. Nevertheless, some preliminary remarks on definitional and conceptual issues will help to place the issues addressed in the substantive discussion. The lack of clarity on what is to be understood by ‘multicultural’ or ‘intercultural’ education is not specific to Latvia, of course.

Nevertheless, in the case of Latvia there is the additional factor that in both popular and educational expert perceptions multiculturalism is frequently reduced to national minority education and/or bilingual education, and this adds the dimension that 'multicultural', 'intercultural' or 'bilingual' rhetoric at times serves to consciously or unconsciously mask nation-building policies. This potentially confusing and not necessarily coherent conceptualisation of the topic means that it is useful to make explicit some questions to keep in mind.

The fact that 'multicultural education' has generated a lot of definitions is recognized by Farideh Salili and Rumjahn Hoosain, but they affirm that 'educators' would generally agree on two points. The first point is that 'multicultural' education would be about "teaching students to accept, understand and appreciate culture, race, social class, religion and gender differences" (Salili and Hoosain, 2001, 6). The second point is that 'multicultural' education is about the reinforcement of commitments to justice, equality and democracy.

Another common approach is stressing that multicultural education means that society's diversity should be reflected in curricula and teaching materials. An example of this can be found in James A. Banks' affirmation that in 'multicultural' education "the curriculum should be reformed so that it will more accurately reflect the histories and cultures of ethnic groups and women" (Banks, 1993, 4).

Variants of this emphasis on reflection appear quite frequently. The recognition of oneself in the educational content presented in the classroom is the aspect Ineke Mok and Peter Reinsch[1] (quoted by Maria Golubeva) focus on: "All pupils should be able to find their own cultural backgrounds and lifestyles reflected in the subject matter dealt with in class(...)" (quoted in Golubeva, 2006, 22)

Different authors include a variety of diversity grounds to be reflected in multicultural education. Hiie Asser, Karmen Trasberg and Larissa Vassilchenko provide an interesting example, as they also call for including potential future diversity, which may be particularly relevant to the Latvian situation, where it is reasonable to expect a substantial increase in cultural diversity due to migratory flows in the upcoming years:

> "[the syllabus] should reflect the ethnic, gender, age and cultural composition of society, as well as the vision of society's future development." (Asser, Trasberg and Vassilchenko, 2004, 34)

There is also an additional dimension which focuses on the goals of education of producing well-functioning members of society. For example, Banks states that "multicultural education is an education for functioning effectively in a pluralistic society" (Banks, 1993, 5), and also that "an important goal of multicultural education teaching is to help students to understand how knowledge is constructed" (Banks, 1993, 11), which may however not necessarily translate into any useable criteria when analysing practice. In fact, very often 'multicultural' or 'intercultural' education are claimed to be related to justice, tolerance, diversity, individual autonomy but it is

[1]Mok, Ineke and Reinsch, Peter (ed.) *A Colourful Choice: Handbook for intercultural teaching materials* (Utrecht 1999; text available on www.parel.nl).

sometimes difficult to perceive in what extent definitions proposed are about cultural diversity as such or interaction, and it is not clear how this plurality can be integrated and managed in practical terms.

The pattern appears to be similar for "intercultural education". For example, Alessio Surian, when he talks not about the definition, but about the aims of "intercultural education", states that children should "become aware of other cultures", "increase awareness of (their) culture" and "be aware of oneself, realize the deep influence of one's own culture" (Surian, 1998, 312-313). He ends with this declaration of principle:

> "(...) an intercultural perspective seems particularly useful for encouraging pupils to reflect on global issues with up-to-date tools, enabling active and critical citizens attitudes both at the local and at the global level" (Surian, 1998, 314)

Lack of clarity in the definition of 'intercultural education', and also in the relation between multicultural and intercultural, is also apparent in Latvian literature as, for instance, this kind of education is defined by Ieva Margevica and Anna Kopelovica as:

> "... necessary for everyone who wants to participate actively in the social, political, economic and cultural life of the society. When participating in the multicultural education learners obtain a multicultural vision, which is critical, creative and intercultural."(Margevica and Kopelovica, 2003, 3)

Not surprisingly, this lack of definitions and conceptual clarity is reflected also in policy documents and debates, where there is a variety of interpretations of what the subject matter actually is when talking about multicultural education. To the extent that there is public debate about intercultural/multicultural education – that is, not much – the focus tends to be on Russian-speaking minorities and schools with this language of instruction. In fact, multicultural education is frequently reduced to more narrow topics. In public discussions, as well as in official documents, 'multicultural education' often triggers association to 'bilingual education'. In a further reductive step, it is not infrequent that 'bilingual education' is interpreted as the teaching of Latvian in 'minority schools' or 'Russian-speaking' schools. Another variation of reductionism, which also limits the understanding of the concept, is the automatic assumption that multicultural means inclusion of the "national minorities".

2.2. Educational context

Education, like so many other spheres of life in Latvia, has undergone dramatic changes as part of the system change that occurred after independence was re-established in 1991. The Soviet legacy included a highly centralized system with educational goals stressing the collective over the individual. The existence of a divided school system, with separate Latvian-language and Russian-language schools, was also a heritage from the Soviet times. These schools had different curricula, and the duration of schooling differed (it was one year longer in Latvian-language schools).

The reforms the educational system has been undergoing, as well as challenges posed by insufficient budgetary resources and a need to build capacity to prepare for a

contemporary approach to education are the context within which specific issues such as intercultural education and minority education have to be seen.

Turning the bifurcated Soviet schooling system into a unitary system was established as a primary goal of education policy already at independence. The achievement of a unitary education system is seen as a significant success and is presented as a clear break with the Soviet times. All schools are part of this unitary system, which provides for the same standards and centralized exams for all schools, which may, however, follow different, clearly defined programmes.

An issue regularly recurring in education debates is the centralization or decentralization of education. The Soviet legacy left a highly centralized system – as in all spheres of life -- and much effort was put into decentralizing it. Nevertheless, critics still claim that too many decisions, regulations and supervisory powers are determined at the top, at the national government level. Some educational policy professionals encountered during the project explicitly expressed fears of tendencies of recentralization, which in their view would hamper progress in reforming further the education system.

The demographic situation of the country clearly is a general background factor that directly influences the factual schooling situation as well as the legislation and policies developed. The 40% of the population which belongs to minorities has substantial weight in making claims for specific accommodation within education. The largest minority ethnic group is Russians, who represent 28% of the population, followed by Belorussians (3.7%), Ukrainians (2.5%), Poles (2.4%), Lithuanians (1.4%), Jews and Roma (both below 0.5%) and others. Although some 17% of the population are still non-citizens, this is not relevant for their claims to education (except for possibilities for political participation and hence an indirect effect on policies by participation in elections). In contrast to this demographic picture, newcomers such as immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers still represent very small numbers. Consequently, there has been practically no attention paid to the education of immigrant children, and even the requirements to provide basic and secondary schooling for refugees and asylum seekers, although guaranteed by legal norms as required by EU and international standards, has not led to the elaboration of any policy or programme for the accommodation of these children (especially with origins outside of EU). Apart from limiting the conceptualisation of multiculturalism, the fact the situation concerning newcomers is likely to rapidly change, this represents a serious shortcoming in the educational system as such.

2.3. Legal framework and system of education

The right to education is guaranteed in the Constitution, which in Article 112 states "Everyone has the right to education. The State shall ensure that everyone may acquire primary and secondary education without charge. Primary education shall be compulsory." Although ethnic minorities and cultural diversity are not directly defined and protected constitutionally, there is nevertheless a general right to preserve one's language and identity in Article 114, which states: "Persons belonging to ethnic minorities have the right to preserve and develop their language and their ethnic and cultural identity". There is, however, no definition of ethnic minority, and the Article is generally considered purely declarative.

The legal basis for the educational system in Latvia is the Education Law (adopted in 1998 to replace the initial law from 1991), the Law on General Education, the Law on Professional Education and the Law on Higher Institutions of Education.

Primary education consists of 9 classes and is compulsory, from age 7 to 16, in general education or vocational schools. Secondary education consists of three years, grades 10-12.

The Cabinet of Ministers determine the policy and strategy of education, within the legal framework established by parliament. The Ministry of Education and Science is the central executive institution in the field of education, but public schools providing general education are the responsibility of municipalities, although these are subject to supervision by the Ministry. Vocational schools (as well as special schools) are under the direct responsibility of the central government, however. Primary and secondary public schools are runs by the municipality, with municipal budget resources. The school has a substantial degree of independence in developing, albeit subject to central authorities' approval, and implementing educational programmes, as well as in hiring teaching staff. Educational standards, however, are determined centrally and set down in official regulations (both a national standard for the relevant education, as well as standards for the separate subjects).

A general education teaching content reform has been in the making for several years in Latvia, and a number of new subject standards have been developed. They were started to be implemented in 2005/2006 and some are implemented in 2007/2008, including an integrated social sciences subject, which will include ethics, health education, introduction to economics and civics and be taught all through the nine grades of compulsory education. Aspects relating to diversity, tolerance and intercultural education are reportedly to be included in the standards. A debate – on occasion quite heated -- on whether Latvian history should be taught separately as a subject or as an integrated part of world history has been going on for the last few years, and a draft standard History of Latvia was developed in the summer of 2006 and is presently tested in a number of schools (until now the history of Latvia has been taught as part of general history, and the choice of whether to separate out the national history or teach it in an integrated manner with world history has been up to the teacher, as long as 1/3 of the time allotted was spent on history of Latvia).

Teachers in Latvia are not civil servants and therefore do not come under the legislation governing these, but it is important in the context of minority education to note that the Ministry employs directors of educational institutions supervised by the Ministry (not higher education), and also can propose the dismissal of school directors of schools run by the municipality.

The choice of teaching methods and materials is relatively decentralized, and teachers may choose textbooks from a list approved by the Ministry of Education and Science, as well as use auxiliary materials of their choice.

Legal provisions included in the Law on Education and the Law on General Education foresee the possibility for schools to follow specific minority education

programmes. These programmes can include, in addition to the general educational programme, specific programme parts related to ethnic minority culture.

Law on Education

Section 41 - Educational Programmes for Ethnic Minorities
(1) Educational programmes for ethnic minorities shall be developed by educational institutions in accordance with State educational standards on the basis of general educational programme models approved by the Ministry of Education and Science.
(2) Educational programmes for ethnic minorities shall include content necessary for acquisition of the relevant ethnic culture and for integration of ethnic minorities in Latvia.
(3) The Ministry of Education and Science shall specify the subjects of study in the educational programmes for minorities which must be acquired in the official language.

As can be seen from the legal text, the conception of minority education includes the cultural identity preservation aspect, as well as integration into Latvian society. Although the content of programmes has not generated much controversy, such is not the case concerning the role and proportion of minority language and official language, as is explained in section 2.5.

2.4. Language focus

The dominant position of the Russian language in the public sphere during the years of Soviet occupation, combined with the presence of large numbers of permanent residents with no or minimal knowledge of Latvian set the stage for a strong counterreaction, clearly linked also to issues of identity. The stress on strengthening the position and increasing the use of Latvian started already at the end of the Soviet period, and the Language Law adopted in 1989 declared Latvian the official language.

Arguably, the core of the official position on minorities can be found in the Official Language Law of 1999, which explicitly confirms the centrality of the linguistic issue in Latvian politics:

> Section 1.
> The purpose of this Law is to ensure:
> 1) the maintenance, protection and development of the Latvian language;
> 2) the maintenance of the cultural and historic heritage of the Latvian nation;
> 3) the right to freely use the Latvian language in any sphere of life within the whole territory of Latvia;
> 4) the integration of members of ethnic minorities into the society of Latvia, while observing their rights to use their native language or other languages;
> 5) the increased influence of the Latvian language in the cultural environment of Latvia, to promote a more rapid integration of society.
>
> Section 2.
> This Law prescribes the use and protection of the official language in State and local government institutions, courts and institutions constituting the judicial system, as well as in other institutions, organisations and undertakings, the educational sphere and other spheres.
> ...

The goal of the legislation sounds essentially oriented towards the defence of the Latvian language ('the maintenance', 'the protection', the 'heritage', the 'influence'...), and even though the right for members of ethnic minorities to maintain their native language is acknowledged (note that this does not imply any special minority language status, however). The expanded use of Latvian is seen as a powerful tool for integration.

There are two groups whose language benefits from special provisions in the Law. First, the Livs, whose language belongs to the Finno-Ugric language group, are recognized as an indigenous people (Section 4). In practice, the last census of 2000 shows that 177 persons identified themselves as Livs, and among these there is no more than a handful who retain proficiency in the Liv language. Nevertheless, the language has a protected status. The second exceptional position is given to Latgallian, which has a status of a variant of Latvian (Section 3). It is historically spoken in the Latgale region in the eastern part of Latvia. Excepting these two, all other languages are considered as foreign languages. Russian language, although native to almost 40% of the population, legally has the same status and therefore legitimacy to claim special accommodation in Latvia as Italian, French, German or Japanese.

As the integration policy concept was elaborated in the second half of the 1990s, it also became clear that the Latvian language had a central role in the official view of the integration of ethnic minorities. As in other spheres of policy, in education the focus concerning minority schooling was mostly on issues concerning language of instruction and the challenge of how to increase the Latvian proficiency of minority students. The close link between language and identity arguably became even stronger as the public discourse surrounding language in education developed and

polarised during the time of the minority education reform. Allegiance to independent Latvia became linked to the willingness to learn Latvian, and the corollary was that any support for retaining teaching in other languages – and in particular in Russian, as the former oppressor's language – became suspect as a potential lack of support for the independence of Latvia. It is important to realise that contrary to many other situation, in Latvia the strengthening of Latvian implies a focus not only on proficiency and actual frequency of usage of language, but also on the attitude towards the language. Without understanding recent history and this psychological and emotional baggage, it is difficult to make sense of why minority education has focused almost exclusively on the language issue. This focus on language as the main identity marker and the paramount importance ascribed to Latvian also contributes to undermining the comprehension of multiculturalism, and as a consequence, also multicultural and intercultural education in Latvia.

It should be added that it is not only the majority representatives and Latvian policy-makers who attach such key importance to language, but also representatives from the minority. This is not only because of the mobilising effect of perceiving a potential threat to the Russian language in the implementation of the official policy of increasing the share of Latvian in Russian-language schools, but "linguistic identity" among Russians in Latvia has also has been identified by academic researchers as the most important characteristic of the Russian minority's ethnic self-awareness. The researcher deems that this linguistic identification has an important stabilising role of in the transition from a Soviet "imperial" identity to the identity of a national minority. (Volkovs, 2007, 101-102)

2.5. Types of schools

Officially – and importantly as a distinction from the Soviet system – the Republic of Latvia has a unified education system, of which all schools form a part. The programmes, standards and requirements are the same for all schools, and the law does not foresee different types of schools. The "minority schools" of popular parlance are actually general schools implementing a minority education programme. Achieving the unitary school system was a prominent policy goal ever since independence, but in certain contexts the argument takes on an ideological tint, when it surfaces as a policy-maker response to charges of de facto segregation or separation in the school system.

In practice, however, there are three types of schools, even if all of them do follow the state programmes. The most numerous ones are schools with Latvian as the language of instruction, the second largest group consists of schools, which teach in both Russian and Latvian, and the third, smallest group of schools are actual ethnic minority schools, where instruction takes place partly in Latvian, but where emphasis is put on the particular ethnic minority culture and history, as well as teaching of the (non-Russian) minority language.

The non-Russian minority schools made their appearance at the end of the Soviet period, and the first Jewish school in the Soviet Union was established in Riga. In the course of a few years Polish, Lithuanian, Ukrainian and other schools were established, and the government has been strongly supportive of the creation of this type of minority schools. In comparison to the Latvian-language and Russian-

language schools, the "true" minority schools are few and concern a small number of pupils. Nevertheless, it is the existence of these different types of schools that provides the basis for the government's claim that Latvia has a well-developed multi-ethnic school system.

According to Ministry of Education and Science data[2], in the 2007/2008 school year there were 958 general education schools in Latvia. 722 of these had Latvian as language of instruction, 141 used Russian and Latvian ("Russian-language schools"), and there were also 88 schools that had both types of education in parallel, the so-called "two-stream schools". In addition, there were 7 schools with a different language of instruction (as well as Latvian) – 5 Polish, 1 Ukrainian, 1 Belorussian).
Pupil distribution in general education day schools shows that 184,000 pupils go to Latvian language schools, 65,000 to bilingual Russian-Latvian schools, and only some 1,400 to other language schools, of which 1,100 to Polish schools. Not surprisingly, in the capital Riga, where only round 40% of the population is ethnically Latvian, the distribution of pupils is almost even: of the approximately 72,000 pupils 50% go to Latvian language schools, while 49% go to bi-lingual (Russian) language schools.

History of ethnic schools
The school system on the territory of Latvia has a long tradition of separateness along linguistic or ethnic lines. Several types of schools coexisted in Latvia already before the creation of the independent Latvian state in 1918, as a consequence of the initiative of Baltic Germans during the 19th century (Björklund, 2004). More than linguistic differences, this divided system expressed the supposed 'ethnic' division of the society and translated the power relations between different groups. In order to describe the rationale that has inspired the successive education policies on the territory of the current Republic of Latvia, Björklund considers that "ethnicity has been the fundamental social category" (Björklund, 2004, 110) and was tightly identified historically in this region with power possession and political status.

During the early years of the independent Latvian state - between 1918 and 1940 - this pluralist structure was guaranteed by the young Republic according to the principle of "cultural autonomy" (Batelaan, 2002). Although this corresponds to the interwar Wilsonian and League of Nations approach to minorities in general terms, the resulting situation for minorities in Latvia was for a few years one of the most liberal in Europe. For schooling this meant that minorities were authorized to set up not only their own schools, but they were also in control of their own curriculum. But gradually the minority policies became stricter. In 1923, a law stipulated that when more than 40% of children enrolled in a school did not belong to the minority group of the school, the school must be turned into a Latvian one. In 1932, a regulation imposed the "principle of nationality" that commanded that only German children can register in German secondary schools. The aim of regulation was to fight the influence of German schools and language in the young republic. With the coup d'état of Kārlis Ulmanis in 1934, Latvian nationalism was strengthened and the autonomy accorded to minorities was substantially decreased.

[2] Http://izm.gov.lv/updload_file/Izglitiba/Vispareja_izglitiba/Statistika/2007/apmac_val_skoleni_07.xls and Http://izm.gov.lv/updload_file/Izglitiba/Vispareja_izglitiba/Statistika/2007/skolu_sk_07.xls

During the Soviet period, separate schools were maintained, but on a different basis and with a different rationale. There were Latvian language schools alongside Russian language institutions. The distribution of children between the two different systems did not completely follow an ethnic logic, however. The argument was that Latvian speaking schools were "ethnic" and should gather children who were members of the national group of the Republic. But, Russian speaking schools were supposed to be strictly 'internationalist' schools that welcomed all children not ethnically affiliated with the titular ethnic group of the Republic.

The Russian language dominated the public sphere but, since 1958 and the Soviet reforms of education, the Republic was officially bilingual. However, in daily life, children who attended Latvian language schools had to learn Russian and spent one more year at school than Russian-speaking children, supposedly in order to learn good Russian. On the other hand, one category of children was freed from the obligation to learn Latvian: children whose parents worked for the military forces (some headquarters of the Red Army for the Baltic region were situated in Riga). The schooling system during Soviet times, combined with language use in public led to the situation at independence in 1991, when a much larger share of the ethnically Latvian population was bilingual, proficient in both Latvian and Russian, while many more Russians and other native Russian-speakers were monolingual.[3]

2.6. Minority school reform

The main issue concerning minority education until the present time has been the transformation of the schools that in the Soviet times used Russian as language of instruction. The state policies of strengthening Latvian language also meant that attention was focused on introducing Latvian into these schools, thus gradually making them bilingual, ostensibly to better prepare the graduates of these schools for higher education or employment in Latvia, but clearly also as part of an integration policy in which Latvian language proficiency and use was given a key position.

In 1998 legislation was amended, and the Ministry of Education elaborated a programme for the gradual increase of instruction in Latvian, with four different models from which all public primary schools, which followed a programme of minority education (one of the legally defined specialised types of education), could choose, or else they could also propose their own model, to be certified. The aim of the models was to start with different levels of Latvian in grade one – the minimum being Latvian as a language to be taught, -- but to reach by grade 9 a situation where approximately 50% of classes would be taught in Latvian. The first grade pupils who started school on 1 September 1999 were first to experience this, and they are thus graduating grade 9 in the spring of 2008.

Although the primary school reform created some worries at the time, main tensions over minority education were reserved for the secondary school proposed reform. The Law on Education included Transitional Regulations, which stipulated that

[3] According to 1989 Soviet census data, 68.7% of Latvians claimed a command of Russian, while only 22.3% of all Russians in the Latvian SSR claimed knowledge of Latvian.

transition to Latvian as the language of instruction should be made on 1 September 2004 for all tenth grades with a minority education programme. The Law on General Education was adopted in 1999 and included the possibility to implement a secondary minority education programme, which would include the native language of the ethnic minority "and education content related to minority identity and integration in Latvia"(Article 42). The ambiguities of what the content of this could be and to what extent minority language could be retained as a language of instruction remained until May 2003, when after much controversy and political debate the ratio of a minimum of 60% of instruction in the state language in secondary schools was finally clarified in regulations. However, in January 2004 the Law of Education amendments passed in a second reading in parliament did not include the norm, but reverted to the previous formulation of only teaching minority language as a subject and minority identity related subjects in the minority language. Only after serious protest actions and a threat by the President that she would return such amendments to parliament for review were the amendments included in a third reading, on 5 February 2004. This late date of adoption and the mixed signals by majority politicians on the acceptance of minority education with a significant share of non-Latvian instruction created tension and increased the distrust by minorities towards the majority politicians. The long road to minority education language norm adoption and implementation of the secondary school reform in 2004 were accompanied by large-scale protest actions by ethnic minority stakeholders, as well as sharp rhetoric by majority policy-makers on the allegedly disruptive and potentially disloyal stance by minority activists, who were accused of opposing the state language and therefore Latvia itself.

It was in these circumstances that the first large-scale demonstrations ever in independent Latvia were organised by minority associations, NGOs and opposition MPs, also involving the pupils themselves. By the Latvian politicians these events were generally interpreted as expressions of an underlying will to not learn Latvian, and therefore not to integrate in the Latvian society and ultimately as an open gesture of defiance toward the Latvian independence as such. The Latvian language media initially represented several angles on the events, but eventually also lined up behind this kind of interpretation. Possible provocations and funding from Moscow for the protest activities were also frequently referred to, intensifying the Latvian insecurities. On the other hand, the Russian-language politicians, community leaders and media interpreted this requirement as a clear attempt by the state to Latvianize minorities and suppress the Russian culture in Latvia. Although surveys conducted in early 2000s consistently showed support from among Russian-speaking minorities for learning Latvian and also for bilingual teaching, and although even the most radical opposition politicians consistently repeated that they do not question the need to learn Latvian, but object to the manner in which it is being imposed, opposition to the 2004 reform grew and a general atmosphere of rising ethnic tension prevailed for the first time in the independence period. Each side saw the language requirements as a zero-sum game: whatever one language would "win", the other would automatically "lose".

In reply to the protests, Prime Minister Repše issued statements that pointed to the provocations and in an infamous statement claimed that it was "the long hairy arm of Moscow" that could be discerned behind the events, but that this is an indication of the "agony of the evil". He was joined by Minister of Education Kārlis Šadurskis, who also declared that he would refuse any dialogue with the provocateurs. Even the

more moderate minister who succeeded him, Juris Radzēvičs, considered that demonstrations of Russian associations, students, opposition politicians had more to do with provocation than with a strictly political opposition to the reform.

The president of the Republic of Latvia - Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, in an interview to a Russian weekly argued that the Russian-speaking population in Latvia must accept that Latvia became independent and the fact that they are Latvians -- of Russian origins but, first and foremost Latvians. She added that if they really wanted to be Russian, they had the possibility to return to Russia.[4] This last statement should be contrasted with an anonymous comment made by a principal of a Russian-speaking school in Riga:

> "I think a Russian must remain a Russian, no matter where he lives. He must accept the political life of the country in which he lives, he must respect the culture and the people of that country, but he has to preserve his own culture." (The Baltic Institute of Social Sciences, 2002, 82)

Obviously, two different conceptions of the social membership collided, two enterprises of cultural preservation were at work. The president asked Russian-speakers or 'ethnic' Russians to feel Latvian *with Russian origins*. This would, in fact, require a major shift in the constituent parts of individual identities, and can conceivably be perceived as a threat to minority cultures and identities. In addition, the change in the social position of majority and minority entailed that some Russians had difficulty accepting a role as a minority. Instead, they were making claims to being a constitutive ethnic group, on par with Latvians and Livs. On the other hand, the position that 'Russians should stay Russians' fixes this identity as a given, from which one can enter and exit very clearly. Apart from simplifying identity and seeing it as one-dimensional, these views also completely ignore the Latvian reality of high levels of ethnic intermarriage and children, as a result, of mixed ethnic heritage. If the remark of the president illustrates a tough view of integration means and demands for adjustment addressed solely to the minority, the principal's assertion instead seems inspired by a rigid conception of identity and the worry about the preservation of authenticity. This rigid conception of identity helps to understand why at least a part of the 'Russian community' agrees to the "linguistically integrated but in different schools" discourse.

Debates that took place during this period confirm that:

- the main fear of many Latvian-speakers and politicians was that Russian-speakers would refuse to integrate and, in that case, would threaten social cohesion and state stability. The fear was that Russian-speakers who were opposing the reform did not actually want to learn the language and then would refused to become full citizens. Furthermore, there was an anxiety about the danger of a bisection of Latvian society.,
- a significant share of Russian-speakers worried about the survival of their language, culture and identity in Latvia. They were also concerned with the way that reform had been set up (with formal debates and public discussions, but little serious attention from the governmental side to the remarks or criticisms raised by Russian-

[4] „Prezident Latvii Vaira Vike-Freiberga: 'My khotim sdelat' russkikh latyshami", *Argumenti i fakti*, 12 May 2004, available at http://gazeta.aif.ru/online/aif/1228/08_01?print

speakers' representatives and opposition MPs) and implemented (in too short a time and without adequate preparation, according to them).

This assumption that having Russian as mother tongue implies a certain potential of defiance towards the state, the Latvian culture, language and identity still lurks in the background. Being a Russian or Russian-speaker is to be identified as a potential former colonizer (which also explains the radically different attitude towards the Polish, and even Ukrainian and Belorussian minorities, when they assert their ethnicity and culture).

The sensitivity of the language issues in Latvia, the perception of language as the main identity marker and the preoccupation with Russian-language schools and national minority schools create a background situation which potentially hampers the development of multicultural approaches in education (and other fields). One of the interviewers who favors a multicultural approach as a constructive solution to the social reality in Latvia, nevertheless also points to the fact that presently the situation is blocked:

> But here multiculturalism offers a very good approach. This multiple identity, this is concept which is not at all popular in Latvia. In my view, this might be indeed very constructive. If people feel that Latvian language and culture is a part of their identity or is one of their identities, maybe not dominant identity but still one of them, they will perceive Latvian as one of their languages and they will be eager to use it. But this requires very smart policies from the part of the state, mostly at the symbolical level, not only on the legislative level. This requires sort of messages. Unfortunately what is going now…The main task of the state is to send this positive message that Russian language is, on the other hand, a part of Latvia. Now the main discourse and the main paradigm is that Russian language is something alien, imposed, external, and aggressive and doesn't belong to Latvia. This is a deadlock. If we insist that Russian language is alien it alienates these young Russian speakers…. But if we change this paradigm, if we say 'Yes, we have Russia, which is a very problematic neighbour with whom we try to build good neighbourly relations, but we face problems, but anyway we will try our best, while in the meantime, Russian is also a part of Latvian society, as dear to us as the ethnic Latvian part of our society. Russians are an integral part of Latvia so it is also part of our Latvian identity.' No doubt it is true. So, this, in my view, would be very constructive. It could offer different perspectives of multiculturalism in education, too. And the idea of two official languages is not at all related to this idea. No, there can be a certain hierarchy between languages -- that is not a problem at all. But, unfortunately, I don't see a real political possibility to change this paradigm, this concept. (interview)

3. Perception of minority schools, mainstream schools

An interesting question that sheds some light on the conceptualization of multiculturalism in education as well as potential openness to multicultural education is the perception of the role of minority schools in the Latvian education system. The official discourse on the unitary system does acknowledge the existence of minority education programmes, and the role of schools implementing them in preserving and

promoting minority identity and culture, while ensuring proficiency in the official language, is generally given a positive value. Policy-makers and implementers have over time been making the point that in contrast to schools such as the Polish, Jewish, Ukrainian schools, the Russian-language schools do not in fact focus on Russian culture and identity, but are mainstream schools with bilingual instruction, and should not be treated as minority schools with any positive contribution to ethnic minority identity. At the same time, policy questions on minority education have focused mostly on the Russian-language schools. The interviews conducted provided some insights on different positions regarding this question.

3.1. National minority schools and Russian language schools

What appears in most interviews is a divide between an official, formal position – the response that there are only one type of school, since the system is unitary – and a recognition of reality, where in practice the majority and minority schools are different. Although the interpretation of what these differences are, and even on the question of whether minority schools exist de facto, and what criteria determine what is a minority school, differ greatly, the dichotomy itself is evident in almost all interviews, whether consciously expressed or unconsciously.

A general tendency is to first stress that there are no national minority schools, but only programmes implemented by certain schools, which are part of the same system as all schools. This formal approach also means that the programmes are defined very closely to the legal definition, as programmes including the ethnic minority language and culture, or promoting ethnic minority identity, but including also the Latvian language. Despite this formal approach with its stress on programmes, the same interviewee actually does use the term “national minority schools” in the interview.

One of the officials most closely involved with the minority education development over many years in her interview also seems to jump between the formal approach in which there are no such schools, and recognition of reality, where different schools exist, but her interpretation of these schools is more graduated and complex than that of other interviewees, where she foresees the possibility that some of the smaller minority schools may “graduate” into that category sooner than others, although she stresses that none of them are quite there yet:

"I will say that presently **there are no national minority schools in Latvia, although five Polish schools consider themselves**, of course, to be part of Latvian culture, but also as belonging to a certain ethnic identity, that is, to the Poles. So, **Polish schools could be considered** national or minority schools. It's possible, that over time it will be possible also to consider as such…Oh, of course, as such schools we can also consider the **Jewish schools**. (Well, we can say that the only municipal school links this to cultural and religious belonging, and the only private school more to religious belonging.) So we could in fact speak of two national schools. **The other schools are still more or less linked to the use of language of instruction**. Here I think Russian, Belorussian, Ukrainian, to some extent, although the Ukrainians are still posing themselves the dilemma to what extent they belong to Ukraine and to what extent to Russian as language of instruction. But the Ukrainian school is the third minority school which of course could claim to [belong to the category of] national minority, but that is again dependent on how independent, supportive and with what contacts the kin state is with Latvia…If we would have more links with the Ukraine and the Ukraine would be more stable politically then I assume that this schools would become more like the national minority school as the Polish and Jewish schools."…"**Criteria for minority school would be language and self-awareness as belonging to two cultures, as second criterion would be education programme with ethnically specific components and a third criterion would be the school functioning as a kind of cultural centre."** (interview with public servant, emphasis added)

One interviewee brings in a direct element of the ethnic belonging of the students as the key criterion for minority schools, and only adds on the specific programme with cultural elements. In this view, then, we gain see a perception of a fixed ethnic identity which seems to leave little flexibility, including in schooling. The Russian language schools are then in this person's view not possibly Russian, since they are attended by pupils of very mixed ethnic backgrounds (the interlocutor does not address the question of whether the linguistic identity as a Russian-speaker has any legitimacy):

> "National minority schools are those ethnic schools where the majority of students belong to one ethnic group. Although Latvian schools are separate. And where the educational programme is adapted to one of these group's cultural traditions, language etc…" (interview).

Some interviewees tended to stress the element of language more, and only then teaching elements of culture and traditions, to define a national minority school. The language in this case is very explicitly linked to identity, to the point where belonging to an ethnic group is seen as impossible if the language is lost: "First, clearly, is language, because ethnic belonging is formed, takes place in relation to knowledge of language." Giving examples of emigrants who have lost their ethnic language she goes on to say "...if they do not know the language, then we cannot, I believe… they cannot say that they have that ethnic belonging. So that language certainly is at the basis for ethnic belonging or identity**."** Only when prompted again to provide criteria

for such schools did she include other elements: **"**Altogether, minority school criteria -- "language, tradition, culture. Culture and art." (interview)

It appears then, that the conceptualizing of minority education as simply programmes, not schools as such, provides an ideological and policy tool, but does not fully reflect the reality on the ground. This explains that discrepancies within the speakers' expressed views, in which the formal unitary approach gives way to using terminology of minority schools when addressing the issues of content. The criteria, however, on which the category is based are not clear, and although they include elements of language and minority culture, as would be the case for the programmes, several interviewees also address the issue of the actual ethnic belonging of the pupils, and in one case even the links of the school to the presumed ethnic kin state of the pupils -- thereby clearly going beyond programmes and their content.

3.2. Russian-language schools as minority schools?

If the interviewees are not entirely in agreement regarding national minority schools, the range of opinions is even greater when it comes to Russian-language schools, which of course are far more numerous than the numerically small minority schools. This lack of clarity on whether these are or are not minority schools reflects not only the history and development of these schools, but also a discomfort at the potential implications of acknowledging these schools as having a specific and legitimate – and therefore long-term -- function in minority education. The unease in some ways may be seen as echoing the official fear of acknowledging that society may have elements of bifurcation – the "two-community" vs unitary society in public discourse, in which the official position is clear, that there are no such divisions in society. Focus on language, again, may in any case make overcoming any potential divisions seem quite easy – if all learn and use the state language, then any potential division can be wiped out. For those who see more divisions between the Latvian majoritarian community and Russian-speaking minority community than simply language, the positions are subdivided into "pro-integrationist" and an apparently much smaller part of minority group representatives, who claim that the better model would be a communitarian approach, where separate groups would live alongside each other but with great internal autonomy and limited interaction.

The former minister of education uses a two-prong argument when building the case for Russian-language schools as something separate, neither minority nor majority schools. On the one hand, the idea is self-identification, and here she claims that no such status is claimed by the Russian-language minorities themselves: "We worked a lot on this question three-four years ago. From the Russian community itself we received the recognition that Russian language schools should not be considered national minority schools in a classical sense precisely because in Latvia there is no precise overlap between the ethnic and linguistic minorities." On the other hand, these schools are in her view a distinct phenomenon, contrasting with the schools of the small minorities, citing the Soviet legacy from which the Russian-language schools have come, thus creating "a special category without analogue anywhere else" – but not minority schools. (interview).

Interestingly, a high-raking official working professionally on minority education under this as well as other ministers of education, also states that Russian-language

schools are not minority schools, but bases this not on any self-identification or historic legacies per se, but instead on the clear criterion that these schools only include the element of bilingual education, not the identity-related cultural content which is foreseen in the programmes. Acknowledging in response to the question that Russian language schools could in principle be viewed as minority schools, based on the fact that Russian can no longer be considered a dominant language in Latvia (apart from cities…). Nevertheless, she goes on to deny that position to the Russian-language schools, which she refers to their bilingual teaching as the only defining aspect:

> "But if we speak about the schools of the moment, where instruction takes place in Latvian and Russian, then these, of course, could not be considered national minority schools, because they have only one criterion – instruction takes place in two languages and the belonging takes place only through the language as language of instruction. Actually the cultural and the other aspects are missing.". (interview)

In this view, rather common at the official level, the Russian-language schools are not considered minority schools, although they do follow the minority education programmes on paper (since otherwise they would not be able to have bilingual education). But underlying this position is the possibility extended to those schools that they can become minority schools over time, if appropriate identity-related subjects will be taught there (as well as subject relating to integration in Latvian society). In the interview the argument in continued with the thought that Russians have to get used to being a minority, and then eventually also to seeing this as a positive and enriching thing. The "carrot" then is clearly linked to the argument, on occasion even explicitly formulated by high-raking Latvian politicians, that minority rights are fine, but ultimately, it is the majority which decides – in other words: "minorities should know their place". The implication is that the bilingual schools, as they are increasingly preferred to be labeled by officials, do not have a clear place in the system of minority education, but there seems to be an underlying hope that they will eventually turn into "good" minority programme schools. This position goes hand in hand with broader minority policy assumptions, in which it clearly emerges that the multiethnic aspect of society should be valued and minority cultures are enriching for all, but where political claims and political participation with a specific minority perspective are rejected, and even seen as a threat to the unity and cohesion of the state.

One interviewee not only started out with the formal approach on minority education programmes, but applied the formal criteria consistently, without addressing the actual content of the education programme implemented, thus somewhat paradoxically, considering the official policy position, reaching the conclusion that the Russian language schools are indeed national minority schools: she first identifies the national minority schools as those which implement the special programme including specific minority language and promote ethnic identity, culture, multilingualism etc as well the Latvian language…She states that Russian language schools are also national minority schools, since they implement minority educational programmes.

Another interviewee, in a consistent application of the essential identity argument he used in relation to national minority schools, rejects on this ground the idea that Russian-language schools could be seen as minority schools. Given the view that the minority school is defined by the specific minority to which the pupils belong, Russian-language schools cannot be national minority schools, since they are attended by a great mix of persons (and in this view it seems that that is also the explanation of why Russian cultural elements are not especially included in these schools' programmes):

> "There is a question regarding schools with Russian language. The problem is that these schools do not have an ethnic direction for the reasons that the children's ethnic composition is very diverse. Although some school names do mention that it is a Russian schools, where perhaps there also are various optional spending of free time and some educational process stressing something more of Russian traditions in some educational programme cases. But in general they are schools where there are both Russian, Belorussian, Jewish, Ukrainian, Polish and Latvian children, and in the educational work there is nothing specially emphasizing the Russian cultural element" (interview)

From the point of view of an interviewee who has actively worked with and at Russian-language schools, the questions on whether to define Russian-language schools as minority schools is not obvious, and actually depends on each individual school's approach: **"**One cannot say clearly year or no. Because there are schools which are goal-oriented in implementing programmes which include the Russian ethnic component…and there are schools which do not want to underline the ethnic identity at all." And that is free choice. "And for instance, if a person from a different ethnic group goes to school in a Latvian or Russian schools, to any school which does not correspond to the person's ethnic identity, then the family must do a lot to compensate, in order to still formulate that native identity."(interview)

An interviewee who has been active from the minority side in the dialogue on Russian-language school developments stresses that it is only necessary to take into account the language factor, and therefore, Russian-language schools should be considered national minority schools: "I believe that national [minority] schools in Latvia are those which can be listed depending on the language of instruction. "I believe that the schools which implement national minority programmes in Russian language in my view should be considered Russian national minority national [sic] schools. Even if I understand that the ethnic composition amongst the pupils is diverse." (interview)

Another view from an observer to the process is that Russian schools are minority schools "technically"—by this referring to the numerical situation of the different ethnic groups. (interview)

Another interviewee admits that scientifically defining what is a minority school is not easy, but at a practical level they would be "schools intended for those children belonging to minorities", which also cultivate an identity separate from the majority identity. Regarding Russian schools in Latvia, he responds that there is a

contradiction between the "legalistic" point of view, which is based on the fact that there are only separate programmes, not separate schools and therefore all schools are the same, does not correspond to reality, because, "as to substantive aspects, of course, Russian schools are separate in many respects. There is a certain gap between official rules and reality." Here is the most explicit recognition of the discrepancy between the official vision and reality on the ground, although this is reflected to varying degrees in all the interviews.

3.3. Mainstream schools

The question of what is a mainstream school in Latvia, and whether the schools with various minority programmes and other languages of instruction are part of the mainstream or not elicited a range of different responses among the interviewees, indicating a surprising lack of consensus on facts by persons closely involved professionally with these questions. The perception of mainstream is interesting since it relates to accommodation of minority claims, and the question of whether these are made and accepted within the mainstream or seen as something specific outside, as a "minority school" issue.

The interview answers regarding mainstream again focused on the formal recognition of the unitary system, but in practice, the recognition come through directly or indirectly that there are differences between Latvian language, national minority and Russian language schools, which makes it less clear what mainstream is. For most, it seems, mainstream is associated with Latvian language schools, but others claim that the Russian-language schools – as opposed to the national minority schools with express stress on culture and minority identity – are also mainstream. Interestingly, the refusal by some interviewees to give Russian language schools the recognition as minority schools, does not make them automatically include them in a mainstream category – thus leaving them in limbo, with no clarity on their role or position within the system. The question of whether a stress on the Latvian language and Latvian culture are an essential part of mainstream, or whether other content determines this, thus remains ambiguous. This raises questions regarding the ability of these schools to accommodate other cultures in an integrated fashion, as opposed to specific topics of study.

When asked about mainstream schools, several of the interviewees again refer to the unified education system, linking this idea to the fact, in their view, that there are no mainstream schools or other schools, since all schools as by definition the same. This, then, is again the formal and theoretical (ideological?) approach, and there seems to be clear hesitation in acknowledging that schools differ amongst themselves, although it is not clear why it is seen as being incompatible with the idea that they are part of one educational system.

A key official with experience in minority education development also responds that according to the legal framework, there is no such thing as mainstream, since there is one system. But acknowledging actual practice, she then goes on to identify the different programmes possible, and actually identifies "Latvian language schools" as "mainstream". Later, talking about definitions, the official claims "mainstream" cannot be defined since "school" is not defined, but in a reflection of practical reality,

she actually makes the distinction between minority and majority schools. Then the criterion mentioned in language (Latvian), and the other criterion – that there is no specialized programme. (interview)

Going one step beyond the mere recognition of theoretical unity and de facto difference one interviewee points to the fact that there is an underlying assumption, behind the rhetoric on unitary system, that the model for a school is the Latvian school, which in many ways is different from Russian schools:

> "But, in my view, the key problem is that when the government officials and ideologists and academics speak about the united system of education…the problem is what kind of schools they keep in mind as a pattern of this united system. Unfortunately, this is the Latvian school. The difference between Latvian and Russian language schools is not just in terms of language of education, language of instruction. The difference is much broader." (interview)

He seems to imply, then, that Russian language schools perhaps should be part of a mainstream, but are not, since the perception of a "normal" school in the minds of most officials and policy-makers is based on the model they are more familiar with – the Latvian language school.

Another interviewee explicitly refers to the idea that the Russian-language schools, although minority simply because attended by minority pupils, are also mainstream, as they are part of the "old mainstream", and do not share "the attitudes of minority schools". But she goes on to admit, that "technically", Latvian language schools today are the mainstream schools. (interview) This distinction between old and new mainstream may also indirectly point to another factor, which is, that from the point of view of parents and pupils, the Russian-language schools are indeed mainstream, but under pressure to transform to something else, more in line with a specific minority school. The experience of being "pushed" out of a mainstream increasingly dominated by the Latvians (because in charge of policy) is another dimension which undoubtedly has added potential for ethnic tension.

It should be noted that the terms mainstream and mainstreaming themselves are new to Latvian, and in fact there is no exact translation, which is why frequently the English term is used. Hesitation on the content of mainstream in some cases may also have related to a hesitation on the concept itself. Interestingly, there were also radically different views expressed on whether the term is appropriate or applicable to the existing educational system in Latvia:

The former minister of education sees the complexities of the different schools and their place in Latvian education, but uses one of the favorite paradigms of Latvian politicians – the uniqueness of the situation in Latvia – as reason for not using the concept of mainstream at all:

> "Here again I have to say that in the majority of states this [mainstream] means a school system which educates the majority of children in society in the official language of the society, and thus are considered in society as the norm, as something self-evident. In Latvia we cannot evaluate [the situation] decoupled from our ethno-demographic and historical situation. In this case, we do not have the basis for using this term only for schools with Latvian language of instruction, even if, as we know, presently there is a rather large percentage of non-Latvian family children who also get their education in these schools. The term could be used conditionally to them. But we need to take into account that there is a rather large number of schools with Russian language of instruction and as a result we also have to count on theses schools as a long-term and inalienable part of our education system"…."There was an attempt to make Russian minority schools a few years back, but also with religious and archaic elements"…."So, to resume, this concept of 'mainstreaming' is practically of no use in Latvia, because then we have to engage in long ideological discussions whether this should apply only to Latvian language schools and if not, then why. Therefore I hold that it is not practically useful/appropriate for our system." (interview)

An opposite view is expressed by a minority education activist, who in answering seems to clarify his own thoughts regarding what is de facto mainstream, and then comes to the conclusion that this is a particularly appropriate way of seeing the situation, as it clarifies that in the eyes of the policy-makers mainstream is, indeed, Latvian language schools:

> "In reality, there are mainstream schools in Latvia, and those are determined by the Law on Education. Because, you see, in general in the Latvian legislative framework and vision there are no schools, no institutions of learning, but there are educational programmes, which are implemented by the municipalities or state institutions. That is one. And second, education in Latvia is in Latvian, the state language ,which is Latvian. In other languages, in a few…so, there is an exception (or it could be interpreted as not being exceptions). But the main mainstream are those educational institutions where education is in the state language. That is a very good word, and exactly this word 'mainstream' can be used in our country very concretely and precisely"…"all other schools, where education is not in Latvian cannot be considered mainstream." (interview)

There is a tendency to focus on language on the one hand, and on ethnic identity on the other. However, despite this language focus, it appears that, at least for those following the official line on minority education, language is not sufficient as a criterion for a minority school.

There is a lack of clarity on the categories of the schools, the criteria and interrelation between them – even among the education policy-makers and highest level professionals who have been directly involved and responsible for designing and implementing the reform. The questions on the role and place of the different types of schools lead to long and rather convoluted explanations, starting out with a reasonably clear theoretical point, but when practice is added this then becomes far less clear. There is no consensus, it seems, even among the professionals on these issues – at

least not beyond the parroting of the "unitary system" line. As a result there is no clear message on the different schools, especially on the Russian-language ones. Delving into what is perceived as mainstream also confirms that although there seems to be some hesitation conceptually, in reality these are generally seen as the Latvian-language schools. The Russian-language schools are then neither put into the category of national minority schools by most interlocutors (at least not in their present form, some add), nor are they considered mainstream by most. The positive value put on language and culture dissipates when other forms of claims are perceived – like the right to influence and choose a schooling form, and other matters, which today in Latvia are seen as the realm of (majority) policy-makers.

4. Accommodation of minority students and ethnic diversity in mainstream schools

Several aspects of accommodation of diversity and minority students emerge in the interviews and research materials considered. One is the readiness of Latvian language schools to receive national minority students, especially Russian-speakers. A second question is the openness of schools in general towards an increased diversity amongst pupils in the classrooms, including towards pupils of other ethnic background than the traditional national minorities. Issues such as religious holidays, dress code or lunch menus have not been mentioned anywhere, and information from the Ministry of Education provided upon request confirmed that there are no known cases when these issues have been raised in practice. This is, of course, yet another indicator of the very limited type of ethnic and cultural diversity present in Latvian schools presently.

4.1. Accommodation of Russian-speaking children in Latvian language schools

There has been a gradual increase in the number of minority pupils in Latvian language schools over the last few years, and although there are problems concerning collection and availability of such ethnically disaggregated data, recent information obtained from the Ministry of Education indicates that some 16% of pupils in Latvian language schools in 2006/2007 were actually ethnic (national) minority children.

A study on the situation of minority children attending Latvian language schools published in 2006 asserts that the children do not report experiencing any problems, and both their performance as well as subjective well-being compare positively with those of majority pupils. (These are, however, a specific group of pupils who have pro-actively chosen to attend Latvian-language schools) However, the study also shows that there are reasons for concern over teachers' readiness to deal with a non-monoethnic classroom situation. Although among the teachers surveyed in the study slightly over 50% considered themselves competent to work with non-majority ethnic pupils, around 80% reported that they have had no training in either intercultural or bilingual teaching competencies or in teaching methodology of Latvian as a second language. The most commonly cited problem in working with non-Latvian children was reported as the language and attitude of the child (by about a third of the teachers included). (Austers, Golubeva, Kovalenko, Strode 2006, 12, 16-18)

The fact that the presence of non-Latvian children in Latvian language schools accustomed to being largely monoethnic and certainly monolinguistic, is conceptualized as a problem is also supported by other studies and evidence. Difficulties encountered are thus seen at least as much difficulties with these children (questions of differing "mentalities", difficulties in interaction with their parents), as problems of a system not fit to accommodate them (including lack of teaching materials and methodology and training). (Golubeva 2006, 37-28)

Apart from teachers' level of preparedness for working with minority pupils in ethnically diverse classrooms, despite the increased attendance by minority children in Latvian schools there is also no attention paid so far to develop a system of Latvian language support classes for these students, and the cases are addressed in an ad hoc case-by-case way, highly dependent on the administration and teachers in the individual school. Despite the occasional political use of the increasingly visible choice by Russian-language families to send their children to Latvian-language schools, then, there seem to have been no efforts to prepare schools for the accommodation of these pupils.

There have been signs of opposition to integrating Russian-speaking children in Latvian-language schools. Although the refusal to accept Russian-language children into Latvian-language kindergartens and primary schools have been reported anecdotally many times, especially in the first decade after independence, documentation to prove such a fact was not readily available. An exception is provided by a letter from the Ministry of Education and Sciences in 1995 (letter n°4-37 (1995)), advising Latvian-language kindergartens and schools to not accept children who do not have a good proficiency in Latvian and for whom Latvian is not the language spoken at home. The main apprehension was that if a certain number of Russian-speaking children came to Latvian-language schools, all children would switch to the Russian language. A similar anxiety has been referred to in Estonia, where the problem and debates have in some aspects been parallel to Latvian ones. In a study published in 2000, Estonian students and teachers of Estonian language predominantly thought that: "(...) the presence of monocultural Estonian kindergartens and elementary school classrooms constitute the key to the survival of Estonian language and Estonian cultural traditions" (Vassilchenko and Trasberg, 2000, 72). The rationale could appear contradictory but, according to some authors: "the idea is to unite the system, but to maintain separate ethnic minority schools" (Batelaan, 2002, 363). In fact, "Latvianization" does not imply the suppression of 'minority schools'. Moreover, their existence can be used by governments to justify the multicultural aspect of education, while not burdening Latvian schools with any demands for minority pupil accommodation.

The former minister of education, who is a prominent socio-linguist, known for her arguments that one of the main issues regarding Russian in Latvia is its "self-sufficiency" (i.e. a Russian-speaking person can get by with no Latvian at all), which implies that the Latvian language has to be strengthened and certain restrictions on the use of Russian in public have to be maintained, if not reinforced. The question of the effect of Russian-language children in Latvian-language schools should therefore be seen in this context, and the former minister's views are rather harsh, asserting that in the classroom the teacher should not be permitted to speak in the minority language, except for a concrete, separate word, if there is a need to translate it, but even then, it

should be done individually and not in class. As for informal communication, there is in her view a critical mass when children speaking in a language other than the official one should not be permitted to take on the initiative in informal relations. She contrasts the situation in Latvia to that of the US, where children with English as a second language would normally be from different ethnic backgrounds, not from one ethnic group. She continues:

> "And I even hold the view that in our circumstances the critical mass is 3-4 children who speak in one language, there one simply has to pay the proper pedagogical attention. One should speak to these children so they understand, and also to the whole class. And the message, which should be conveyed is that it is very nice that such children attend our school, that we all enrich each other and they can tell us about their [special characteristics], but they have come here to learn Latvian, our common language, and therefore we should help them." …"Truly, especially in kindergarten there is a big problem, that if three Russian children enter, then the whole group speaks Russian. Of course, Latvian children do not lose anything, they gain, they become multilingual, they get used to functioning in several languages. And that we can congratulate. But after all a school is a school". (interview)

This rather extreme view on the effect of Russian-speaking children in Latvian schools, as well as the implications of how to deal with such a situation, was not shared by the other interviewees. Instead, most of them seemed to agree that there was either no detrimental effect on the use of Latvian, or on the quality of Latvian used. One of the interviewees stresses the difference between formal (classroom) and informal (breaks) communication, making the assumption that the only consideration should be the teaching process itself: "…nothing changes in the classroom if there are more pupils whose families speak in a different language…The fact that children communicate between themselves in a different language in the breaks I do not think threatens the teaching process in Latvian." (interview) Finally, a high-level education official rejects the idea itself, answering briefly on whether the increased presence of non-Latvians would mean that Latvian language use in school would decrease: "that's nonsense!"

It seems, then, that the former minister of education is alone in her views, at least in the company of the interviewed persons. However, not only her high standing as an expert, engagement in politics and former post in education policy gives her position added weight, but it should be acknowledged that the position has been rather broadly discussed publicly at certain points in time, and the theme keeps recurring as a theme recognized by all. Not one of the interviewed persons would advance the idea that Russian can and should have its place also in Latvian language schools, and the main conceptual frame on the question is the perception of a threat to the Latvian language. Such a position of defense does not fit well with an openness to other languages or cultures – even if the case is presumably made "only" for Russian and the perceived threat that this language poses.

4.2. Differentiated preparedness for diversity and multicultural education

Several of the interviewed specialists pointed out that the schools implementing minority education programs are in fact more ready for multiculturalism in education.

While some reduced the idea to its simplest form – the recognition that there is more diversity in classrooms in the Russian-language schools – others actually pointed to the process of change and reform, which those schools have gone through, while Latvian language schools have yet to deal directly with so many of these issues. A correlation between exposure to diversity and openness is made explicitly by one interviewee:

> "Well, we already came to the advantages that implementing minority education programmes in Latvia we find out more about our society, about both diversity and multilingualism. And we are more open. And that is shown by life itself that those who graduate these programs are more open, more free, they are less threatened, they know how to act in various situations and do not feel threatened. Those who [learn] only in one language, they are threatened." (interview)

The theme of openness versus fears reappears in several interviews, also referring to the pupils in diverse environments. The exposure itself, in this line or arguing, brings tolerance and better understanding of others: regarding multilingual schools, the argument is made that these also have a better multicultural environment, where children speak and take languages lightly, are not so afraid to make mistakes, they are more open and become perhaps more flexible in their thinking. "They understand others better. Yes, tolerance is created there. Unconsciously that is created in multicultural schools" (interview)

The equation of multilingual and multicultural schools in these reflections is common, and although in some versions it leads to the reduction of multiculturalism and cultural diversity to linguistic diversity and even bilingualism, in the arguments here it is turned on its head. Here, using linguistic diversity as the starting point, the argument is made that such diversity also entails cultural diversity, and therefore, it is argued, logically the bilingual and multilingual schools and environments are more diverse than monolingual ones, and it is argued that as a result they have a built-in openness to ethnic and cultural diversity (religious is usually not mentioned).

The corollary is that monolinguistic schools are seen as not promoting diversity, since they tend to be monoethnic. The fact that this line or arguing is linked to the specifics of the Latvian context is not taken into account, and the argument is presented as a self-evident truth. In one interview the argument is even made that monolinguistic schools promote segregation -- a self-seclusion (by both minorities and majority) into one's own environment from which both family, friends and future professional contacts will be chosen. This leads to the separation of society, regardless of whether it takes place consciously or unconsciously. (interview)

That actual diversity in schools promotes cultural diversity in general is another version of the argument. As a result of their experience with classroom diversity, teachers in minority schools are, it is argued, better prepared to work in conditions of diversity in general, including other cultures than the traditional ones for Latvia.
Nevertheless, another factor brought up by several specialists is that this perceived openness to diversity is perhaps also as a result of the state policy pursued and "the 17 years that special attention has been focused on minority schools", including on plural cultural identities and their promotion. (interview) Other factors perceived as

advantages of bilingual schools, mentioned more rarely, include greater respect for other nationalities, better dialogue and debating skills, as well as increased possibilities on EU labour market… (interview).

Several arguments are made regarding teachers' preparedness for multicultural education, , ranging from the teacher's exposure, attitude, experience and training and familiarity with different teaching methods. Since teachers in Latvian-language schools have less experience of diversity they are therefore more afraid of it, it is argued, including if they face a situation in the classroom where they have a larger share of non-Latvian native speakers, or a pupil of a different ethnic background than is common in Latvia. The teachers will, in the reported experience by this education specialist, try to escape the situation by claiming not to be prepared professionally for it. In contrast, teachers in minority programme schools have 10 years experience of change. And therefore, "of course it is much easier to speak of changes, novelties or topical issues with teachers from minority education programmes". Often in these schools procedures are better organized and they have adopted more contemporary methods of teaching. They are more ready for problem-solving, since they have confronted a variety of problematic situations over the years of reform and change. (interview)

The director of the Centre of Multicutural Education shares a similar experience, and she stresses as one of the reasons for this presumed better preparedness is that actual intercultural training has benefited this target group among teachers more:

> "Of course, that the teachers who work in schools which implement minority education programmes are, I would want to say, better prepared for diversity. And that is precisely why one of the goals of the Multicultural Centre I head is precisely to work not any longer so much with teachers of minority education programmes, who have already received a lot methodology of teaching substance, but with teachers who implement programmes in the Latvian language". (interview)

Nevertheless, there are a few dissenting voices to this more common view that minority schools are better prepared for multicultural education, at least when it comes to teachers. The former Minister of Education considers it "a myth" that Latvian language school teachers are less prepared. She stresses that in fact most of these teachers have at least some exposure to non-Latvian children, and need only minor methodological support to develop further their skills in teaching classes with a multiethnic composition. (interview)

Another education specialist, when reflecting on teachers and their preparedness, also argues that there is no difference between teachers at the different schools, since they all come from the same educational background and their experience in previous system (but this leads to a more pessimistic view as many are perceived to be rather closed to multiculturalism as value). (interview)

In a version more directly focused on the ethnic composition of the classroom, one interviewee reflects on the development of different schools toward increased ethnic diversity, making distinctions between the schools. He does not believe that the small

minority schools are more open to diversity, compared to Russian-language or Latvian-language schools:

> "Rather there is something else – it is really the Russian-language schools that are forced to be more open to the different, understanding difference as ethnic diversity, because the ethnic composition itself is more diverse than elsewhere. But also Latvian schools are forced to be less ethnocentric because many children of different backgrounds go to the schools. Those times are passed when the schools were monoethnic…" (interview)

In this version, the mere fact of ethnic diversity is inevitable, and this fact itself is seen as entailing that schools will be multicultural. The question of whether policies, programmes, methods or trainings need to be elaborated remains undeveloped in this line of thinking.

Finally, a different argument put forth as an explanation of a supposed greater readiness for multiculturalism by Russian schools does not base this on the mix of pupils or bilingualism, or training of teachers, but on the fact that more and more different elements are introduced in curricula:

> "The last point I would like to make – maybe the Russian schools, what we call "Russian schools", maybe increasingly are becoming real multicultural schools. Because this is officially demanded, more and more, to introduce other language components, other cultural components. And besides, there is, let's say, the requirement of life itself to introduce more English components, French components – European components, I would say. So Russian schools, or what we call 'Russian schools', are doomed to multiculturalism." (interview)

The Latvian schools are perceived as being resistant to such multicultural pressures, and they are seen by the commentator as being more focused on preservation of certain Latvian elements of culture and tradition, which presumably limits their embrace of other cultures:

> "While in Latvian schools, this trend to preserve monoculturalism is very strong. I remember when my colleague in the parliament – Ina Druviete, whom you probably know because she is a very important person in this context – when she became minister [of education], in one of her speeches she [said] that probably Latvian schools also should become bilingual or multilingual, multicultural. [There] was such a huge attack against her! So, she stopped talking about it, but I'm sure she still thinks it should. But she was unable to do anything in this respect."… "Latvian schools are still seen by too many people, very many people, as a cradle for Latvianness, which must be nurtured. This is seen as one of the main missions of these schools. Russian schools are not**.** There is a relatively small…reasonably small, I would say, fraction of the Russian community which also demands that Russian schools must, first of all, nurture Russianness. But this is quite marginal. And these Russian national ideas are not that popular." (interview)

Although the explanatory elements brought forth differ -- multilingualism as relating to multiculturalism, exposure to change and development processes, exposure to ethnic and linguistic diversity in the classroom or actual choice of curriculum and teaching content -- almost all interviewed specialists agreed that the Russian-language schools are in many ways better prepared to incorporate multiculturalism in their teaching methods and content than the Latvian-language schools. The dissenting voices focused either on the pedagogical education and Soviet experience most teachers share, or on the fact that diversity is already present – and increasingly so -- in all classrooms, including Latvian-language schools, thus preparing the teachers through direct exposure to pupils of various ethnic backgrounds. Nevertheless, the focus on the changes required in Russian-language schools, as well as the statistics on attendance of voluntary training courses relating to multicultural education do support the hypothesis that these schools have had more exposure to both actual diversity, as well as methodology incorporating aspects of multiculturalism. This may potentially create challenges for the mainstream schools, in particular if they continue to be perceived as the Latvian ones exclusively. The development of policy and implementation of such a policy on multicultural education therefore seems of paramount importance.

5. Multicultural education policy

5.1. Policy documents: declarative openness

The *National Programme 'The Integration of Society in Latvia'* was adopted in 2001, after a series of public discussions. In it, some recurrent themes in Latvian political discourses are reminded to the reader: loyalty, language, common values etc. and they are strongly tied to the integration process (The Integration of Society in Latvia, 2001, 4, 7). According to the document, being integrated is to respect and identify oneself with the Latvian state and to speak the Latvian language.

> "Integration is taking place when all Latvian residents are actively involved in social life in Latvia. An integrated civil society is one where non-Latvians have a command of the Latvian language, having overcome alienation from Latvian cultural values, and are involved in realising the common goals of Latvian society; and where non-Latvians have the right to preserve their native language and culture." (The Integration of Society in Latvia, 2001, 8)

Right after this excerpt the text states that people must accept the independence of Latvia as a fact, and then links all previous commitments with the stated goal of preserving all different identities and cultures present in Latvia. So the goal is apparently twofold: ensure the stability of the state and protect the minorities' identities.

Within that scheme, education, language and culture are gathered in one chapter, which is indicative of the strong relation that the designers of the Programme saw between the three fields. And, about education - the main goal that is pointed to is the development of Latvian language proficiency.

The National Programme emphasizes that the official aim of education is to preserve the plurality of identities and to ensure integration into the society. To have a more precise idea on what it is involved behind the task of preserving identities, it is essential to note that this text - as numerous others - refers to the necessity of developing a 'bilingual education', which is understood as the learning of Latvian language by non-Latvian speakers:

> "In order to carry out the transition to bilingual models of education, work on development of a methodology for bilingual education must be continued. This should be done by harnessing the experience of Latvian and foreign educators, where bilingual education is joined with modern teaching methods. Development of bilingual education requires the following work:
>
> To develop integrated pre-school programmes, which include bilingual education, learning of the basics of the Latvian language must be ensured at the pre-school age.
>
> To train teachers methodically for work at Latvian nursery schools and elementary schools, where Latvians and children of other nationalities that do not have fluency in Latvian, are learning.
>
> To prepare and continuously educate teachers for work in Russian nursery schools who would be able to professionally prepare children of other nationalities for bilingual educational studies." (The Integration of Society in Latvia, 2001, 57)

In this excerpt it is clear which part of the population is targeted and of what the official understanding of bilingual education is. First, the official language mastering is seen as the essential piece of the integration puzzle. Second, the public targeted is children that come from other 'nationalities'. It is not expected in that text or elsewhere for Latvian-speakers to be educated bilingually. Finally, the Russian-speaking minority is the only group which is explicitly named.

The lack of conceptual clarity with regard to multicultural and intercultural education is also reflected in this policy document. When the time comes to express a view about intercultural education[5], it is said that:

> "(…) emphasis should be put on Latvian life, on the values of civic society, and on democratic interaction. Study programmes should provide knowledge of different views and should reflect the reality of Latvian society in all its diversity" (The Integration of Society in Latvia, 2001, 57).

But in other documents - more recent ones – the words 'multinational' or 'multicultural' appear, even if they are usually not elaborated. In *Development of Education: National Report of Latvia* (2004), the aspect of Latvia as a "multicultural society" is evoked on page 20 (the entire text is 24 pages long) -- but just once. More recently, the general *Latvian National Development Plan (2007-2013)* announces that "An inalienable part of quality of life is a cultural environment and cultural-historical heritage which is preserved, accessible and cared for. Culture is a priority of a welfare society, its role in the preservation of national identity cannot be

[5] The passage about intercultural education in the National Programme consists of one sentence in the document of 136 pages, and the word "multicultural" appears for the first and only time at the page 81. The word "multiculturalism" doesn't appear at all in the entire document.

overestimated." Added on to this rather one-dimensional declaration is the sentence: "At the same time, cultural diversity also has a special place in Latvia's multinational society" (Latvian National Development Plan, 2006, 11).

The document *Basic Positions on Education Development 2007-2013*, adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers in 2006, starts out with a first sentence reading: "Education in contemporary Europe is looked upon in relation to society's diversity, the economic and social rights of human beings, human rights, equal rights and gender equality." Nevertheless, the document includes few explicit references to any multicultural aspects. In the list of problems for the formulation of education development policy no. 15 of 20 listed problems is: "Integration of society is insufficient, tolerance towards the Different in society is not developing." In the section on directions for action, in turn, there is a section on the "Ensuring the education possibilities of Latvia's national minorities". The objectives listed include elaborating methodology for teaching the state language to minority children in pre-schools, state language training of parents, developing more teaching materials in Latvian, evaluate the changes to the minority education programmes implemented in 2004/2005 as well as methodological support of minority language and literature instruction in schools with minority education programmes. Romani children education is also mentioned. An additional point is ensuring the reception of third country nationals in Latvia for exchanges, practice and voluntary work, in compliance with EU Council Directive 2004/144/EC. As can be seen, then, many of the points on the list largely focus on the improvement of Latvian language. Nevertheless, among the outcomes, the first of the four points is "an increased number of intercultural skill seminars and number of teachers who have complemented their intercultural skills." This does not directly relate back to any of the listed aims or results of activities, and thus even if it is conceived as a concrete indicator, it does not seem very convincing or part of any systematic plan. (Izglītības attīstības pamatnostādnes 2007.-2013. gadam, 38-39)

The *National Action Programme for Promotion of Tolerance* was elaborated in 2004 under the auspices of the Secretariat of the Special Assignment Minister for Social Integration. The document is general in nature, and includes a few references to education, mostly in the form of calling for the organising of seminars on tolerance and diversity at schools and with teachers, as well as preparation of auxiliary teaching materials for social science teachers, to plan the inclusion of information on ethnic, cultural and religious diversity in the secondary school standards and programmes. One problem with these listed points – apart from lack of elaboration and the absence of any background explanations – is that the institution creating the programme does not have direct input in the ministry of education work plans, nor has it been given any formal coordinating function. The implementation of any practical suggestions therefore remains open to question.

In general, the approach to multiculturalism and interculturalism, including in education, remains vague and seemingly haphazard. Nevertheless, references to the various related concepts do increasingly appear in policy documents, and to some extent are formulated with increased precision. One of the most recent relevant policy documents is the *Basic Positions on Society's Integration 2008-2018*, which was elaborated in 2007, supposedly on the basis of the 2001 integration programme, which for several years had been deemed by stakeholders to need updating and revision. Instead of creating a new programme, however, which was not on the political

agenda, the route of elaborating "basic positions" was chosen. The document lists a number of factors of the vision of a "desirable situation in 2018"—including the recognition of cultural and linguistic diversity as enriching the state and society, as well as the lessening of the divide between the Latvian and national minority communities, the lessening of "the confrontation of historic interpretation, which is based on diverging historical experience" (p. 8). The insufficient recognition and valuing of cultural diversity is plainly acknowledged, but this is then linked to insufficient resource provided for the protection of the culture, tradition and language of national minority cultures and the Livs (p. 12). This means that on the one hand, a problem of insufficient recognition is acknowledged – which is a development compared to previous official positions – but on the other, the diversity conceived of is the coexistence of the same "traditional" ethnic groups. The table where this problem is listed with actions and expected results foresees action to elaborate and implement a national programme for the support of national minorities, to continue the long-term programme "Livs in Latvia" as well as "ensure that at all levels of education knowledge and skills on cultural diversity are gained, which are necessary for life in a multicultural society, thus increasing the cultural competence of individuals and decreasing culture-centrism." The indicators listed, which will provide the basis for judging success of this action, state that all groups that wish have the possibility to retain their culture, including language, and also develop their cultural competence. The specific indicators listed are an increase in the number of national minority cultural organisations, the correspondence of education content to the needs of multicultural society, as well as an unified information system in society (as opposed to the split along linguistic lines current today, supposedly). In addition, the indicator that polls would show that a majority of the population would recognise as a positive value the fact that they live in a multicultural environment is listed (pp. 30-31). It seems, then, that although there is development in terms of stress on multiculturalism, the attempt to specify what is meant by this shows that there is still s strong tendency to retain previously adopted focus on culture and language, as well as specific national minority target groups. Nevertheless, the document does recognize that an increase in immigration is possible, and that no system for integration immigrants exists in Latvia so far (p. 15), but the suggestions for action and indicators are superficial and general ("successful inclusion of asylum seekers and migrants", the "joining the Latvian labour market of highly qualified specialists") (p. 39).

Despite the development over time of attention to aspects which relate to multicultural society, and multicultural education specifically, in general documents, it is still evident that little or no attention has been paid to analyzing the situation, developing a systematic approach or implementing any clearly formulated strategy or policy. Thus, the movement of implementation and to incorporation of these generally proclaimed ideas in actual work plans has barely started. Education goals in general are not well defined, and any goals relating to multiculturalism are even less so.

Several interviewees explicitly noted that there in their view is a problem with poorly defined goals of education, and in some cases this was ascribed to the lack of underlying consensus on what these should be. Attention was also drawn to the tendency – in the view of the interlocutors at least partly a left-over from Soviet times – of working on the declarative level, with rhetorical flair, but not defining anything that would serve as a clear basis for actual policy (both for education in general, as well as for minority or multicultural education).

A long-term practitioner, who also has policy-level experience, pointed to the lack of clear goals and the lack of attention to implementing mechanisms and resources as a problem that hinders change in practice: "Understand, the goals are expressed in all educational documents in a declarative form. A lot of them! But those goals are, on the one hand, abstract, and on the other, very formally expressed… For example: 'to improve the student's progress' or 'to cultivate a national minority's language and culture'. That's how it is put into the minority education programmes. But in reality it does not appear in the programme as it is not supported by materials, by resources." (interview)

One interviewee identifies the lack of clearly defined goals of education as one of the main problems of the in his view unreformed educational system, and one that may in fact be related to the continuation of some Soviet practices:

> "You know, in principle, there is no clear definition of this goal. This is a major problem. It is very eclectic. It is very empirical, I would say…. Education, the Ministry of Education, in substance remain very much like in the Soviet system. So we are back to this approach of programmes, now standards, very low level of school autonomy, very low level of involvement in democratic participation of parents, imposing not only standards, but very detailed regulations from the governments. So, this is the least reformed system. Probably, this is exactly because this lack of consensus on the main tasks of school system. Empirically yes, of course, each minister brought something new. Some ministers tried to pursue more the goals of development of children and bringing modern values into the system of education. Most of ministers still focus on this ethnic, cultural heritage"…"Unfortunately, still today we don't have a clear concept, a clear approach." (interview)

Apart from the formality of the approach, in several interviews the idea that there is a superficial attempt to adopt language corresponding to European or EU approaches, without any effort to focus o the substance, is also expressed. "We learnt how to speak all correct words. So we know this. We know what the European Commission wants to hear…But there is no realization of the situation behind these words. That's the problem." (interview) or "A lot is supposedly adopted from elsewhere in Europe, but this adoption is still at a very formal level, while real processes are not yet taking place". (interview)

5.2. Programmatic documents and implementation

5.2.1. Programmatic declarations

Moving from the general policy level to the programmatic level, some progress can be noted, at least in general terms. The education standards do include some aspects of intercultural education, be it at the declarative level, with regard to some subjects (civic studies, social sciences). There are no specific multicultural education standards, however. The ISEC reports that some work is in progress, whereby new general secondary education standards will be developed, which will include a special

focus on tolerance, anti-racism, anti-discrimination and aspects of multiculturalism in teaching materials. It is planned that this new standard will be submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers for approval in April 2008. The new criteria for evaluation of study materials and professional attainment of teachers, which entered into force in 2007, reportedly contain some aspects on multiculturalism and tolerance.

One of the interviewed specialists reassuringly also stresses that intercultural elements are already included in standards and programmes, implying that the educational content is "done". She goes on to specify that these elements are also included in criteria for educational material and their evaluation, as well as in continuing education. In the view of this interviewee, who admittedly represents the institutions which has responsibility for these standards, a unified concept on cultural diversity is already included throughout the system. (interview) This view is rather exceptional, however, both amongst the persons interviewed, as well as other stakeholders encountered in the course of the project.

In contrast, the ex-minister of education is far more critical, calling explicitly for radical reform regarding standards in general, not only in terms of intercultural competencies:

> "We should take on the teaching substance and be ready for very radical reforms."…"We have to form the substance standards, they include a lot of useless rhetoric, the idea is hidden behind beautiful phrases on skills, competencies etc. This all forms a smoke screen for the real problems. And we need to be courageous and take a distance from this. Here we should simply formulate what should be taught and not try to formulate self-evident things in these complicated competencies categories." (interview)

In a hopeful sign that there is movement towards elaboration of more practical approaches and implementation the Centre for Curriculum Development and Examination (ISEC) reportedly has produced an inventory of existing educational policies and practices in Citizenship Education for Diversity in Latvia.[6] Although the report also lists legal norms guaranteeing education for minorities in Latvia, as well as main principles for intercultural education, the motivation for such a mapping exercise is supposedly to begin formulating implementation mechanisms.

5.2.2. Implementation: training

In practice, there are no systematic initiatives to explicitly address multicultural or intercultural education within the education system. There have been some initiatives by the non-state sector over the years, usually implemented with foreign funding, focusing on training of teachers, with which some of the relevant state institutions have cooperated. There is in-service training for teachers which includes aspects of multicultural education, as well as diversity and tolerance issues, but this training is voluntary and has according to the Ministry of Education mostly benefited teachers from minority schools, who have shown greater interest in the courses. Intercultural teaching courses, or other related courses, are not included in the mandatory programmes at the pedagogical higher education institutions. Small-scale projects,

[6] Information provided to LCC by ISEC on 12 October 2007.

funded by the EU through the Society Integration Fund have been announced, which included claims to develop further training materials and/or actually implement train the trainers seminars: one foresees training 20 trainers on intercultural education for further work within a school cooperation network, and the other includes plans for providing in-service training in the autumn of 2008 for teachers of history, social sciences, political science or jurisprudence.

Despite the claim of the head of the Centre of Multicultural Education that not only materials have been developed, but a substantial amount of actual training has taken place, this information was not well known by others. Where training has taken place, it seems that it primarily has targeted bilingual school teachers. Apart from interviews and discussions, there were also other indications that such materials and training have not been widely used or are not well known, such as the study on Latvian language schools by Austers, Golubeva, Kovalenko and Strode, which found that approximately 1/3 of teachers were extremely uncomfortable with the idea of working with culturally diverse classes and also to teach diversity. They were reported to be insecure and claimed that they do not feel they know how to teach a target audience that is not mono-ethnic and monolingual. (interview)

5.2.3. Implementation: teaching and methodological materials

Several questions regarding textbooks and teaching materials were raised in the interviews. One issue is whether there are actual teaching materials developed for courses focusing on or including multicultural or intercultural aspects. The other question is the extent to which society's diversity is reflected in general teaching materials and books.

A study on diversity in Latvian textbooks published in 2004 found that both Latvian-language and Russian-language textbooks tend to only minimally reflect ethnic diversity in society. In particular, non-Russian minorities were found to almost never be present in Latvian textbooks, while Russian-language books tend to exclude both Latvians and non-Russian minorities. (Krupnikova, 2004)

An interviewee reported that there has been a study by ISEC to evaluate the correspondence of teaching materials with the goals established, including tolerance and diversity. The study reportedly found that in some cases the materials do already adequately include these aspects, in others they do not, and need to be developed, especially in the social sciences. Also, the interviewee notes that minorities are not yet sufficiently represented in teaching materials, citing as an example Roma culture and language which should be included as elements of positively valued diversity. This should be done both to increase tolerance, but also to promote ethnic identity preservation so that minority representatives would be proud of their heritage." (interview)

The question of whether textbooks reflect the diversity of society triggered quite varied responses, including on whether and to what extent they should, or whether multicultural aspects should be either left to the teacher to prepare and bring in as extra materials, or as a general theoretical approach. Both also expressed reservations on the production of materials formulated explicitly to reflect society:

> "…the main thing is that the materials are available. And it is not at all important that the materials should be 1:1 authentically interspersed civic instruction books or some other teaching literature, or history books, with all the diverse ethnic kaleidoscope, which we have in Latvia now, and which has been that way historically. Then no space would be left in those books for other things than only to characterize this colorful ethnic diversity. But the important thing is that those who wish to bring attention and emphasize such things they have access to – there is literature, there is research literature, various information materials, and they are all usable." (interview)

The former minister of education, although admitting that textbooks are not adequate and that teaching the substance is the main problem (and has not been addressed properly by ISEC) nevertheless stresses that textbooks should not represent diversity "in a primitive way", a token diversity requiring that all ethnic groups be represented, but should instead be oriented to diversity as value (interview).

In terms of specific intercultural or multicultural teaching methodological materials, these are scarce, which was also reflected in the interviews, where almost all interviewees referred to the role of the individual teacher in finding and adopting auxiliary materials for use in class. A spiral-bound publication *Ceļvedis starpkultūru izglītībā* [Intercultural Education Guide] was produced in 2004 by the Secretariat of Special Assignment Minister for Social Integration in an unknown quantity, but information on this is not available on the Secretariat's homepage, nor is the guide itself available any longer. Tellingly, it was a small-scale project funded by the Embassy of the United Kingdom in Riga, and essentially "adapted" by translating Council of Europe and European Commission project materials for youth "T-Kit on Intercultural Learning" and Council of Europe "COMPASS. A Manual on Human Rights Education withYoung People". This material was produced only in Latvian.

Some other materials and methodology have reportedly been developed by the National Agency for Latvian Language Training (LVAVA), under whose auspices attention was paid to develop a multicultural approach in trainings and materials. The agency has had some interesting projects relating to integration – like summer camps for both Latvian-language school and bilingual school teachers, promoting contacts and exchange of experience. Nevertheless, the agency's main aim is the promotion of Latvian language proficiency and developing training materials and provide training for non-Latvian speakers, including Latvian as a second language methodology. A large share of the target group for trainings is teachers of bilingual schools, but the agency has no statistics available on any training specifically including intercultural aspects. The agency's tasks and activities again illustrate that by many, bilingualism itself is treated as interculturalism.

The most serious development of methodology and materials until now has taken place under the Centre on Multicultural Education at the University of Latvia. The Centre was established in 2001 and has been engaged in several European projects. Its aims, as stated on the homepage, are "to create and implement research and study programmes for multicultural and intercultural education, to ensure the exchange of information and the preparation of specialists for work in schools with Latvian language instruction and schools, which implement minority education programmes, as well as to conduct other activities for the promotion of integration in Latvia". As

its director, Vineta Poriņa, states, it explicitly has adopted an approach that intercultural and multicultural aspects should be mainstreamed in education, not be limited to specific trainings or classes on the subject. Interestingly, although the name of the Centre includes the terminology "multicultural", the seminars and teaching materials refer to "intercultural education". However, it seems that no clear distinction is made between the two. It seems that at least some of the development in the direction of intercultural education has been EU-driven – as so many other developments, such as anti-discrimination -- and it is within an EU Socrates project that the *INTER Ceļvedis. Praktisks ceļvedis interkultūrālās izglītības realizācijai skolās* [INTER Guide. Practical Guide for the Implementation of Intercultural Education in Schools] was produced in 2006.[7] This is a 221-page compendium which includes modules of practical activities for teachers in various fields, which promote an intercultural approach, and the introduction specifically asserts that intercultural education is NOT special holidays, targeted days or festivals dealing with diversity or multiculturalism, or the learning about others "to better understand them" or simply mixing pupils of various ethnic backgrounds, without paying attention to ways to promote interaction.

Therefore, it is not surprising that in contrast to the other interviewed persons, and like on issues of methodological materials, the head of the Centre of Multicultural Education asserted that multicultural teaching material has been developed, and that it is adequate. She also claims that preparation of teachers is at a high level and sufficient, admitting only that there is, of course, always room for improvement…. Although the materials on intercultural education are available on the website of her institution, she admitted that the Ministry of Education and Sciences could have given more support so that it could have been published in print form. (interview) Nevertheless, awareness on the approach and the availability of these materials seems extremely limited among other education specialists, including on minority education. National funding for such projects is scarce and undoubtedly reflects the low priority put on intercultural education, and although some materials now do exist (in Latvian only), the general situation seems to confirm the view expressed by many interviewed specialists that any multicultural or intercultural aspects of teaching are entirely up to the individual teacher to develop or not.

The declarative support for multicultural and intercultural education on a policy level is not yet reflected in any systematic approach to implementation. Efforts at including diversity and intercultural aspects in education standards and programmes are not matched by developments at the practical level, and even where some materials and training exist, they are not part of required curriculum or trainings for teachers. Adopting such methods or teaching content is left to individual teacher and school initiative. In terms of participation in trainings, there is evidence that until now bilingual Russian-language schools have expressed more interest in developing skills in related fields. In contrast, it seems that the limited methodological material that there is, is available only in Latvian.

[7] Available at http://www.lu.lv/materiali/fakultates/ppf/izglitiba/resursi/multikult-intercelvedis.pdf

6. Other issues impacting on development of multicultural approaches

6.1. Additional problems of education system

There are several acute problems in the education field, which affect the general system as well as create additional obstacles to the development of multicultural or intercultural approaches in classrooms. In the *Basic Positions on Education Development* some of these problems are enumerated: lack of systematic approach to teacher continued training, insufficient number of teachers, aging of teachers, continued low wages and prestige of the profession.

Several of the interviewees commented on the continued Soviet legacy in teaching styles and methods – listing issues such as "more sticks than carrots, not enough positive attitude" or "authoritarian system of teaching". The relation to the Soviet system is made explicit: "Our teachers are educated in totalitarian Soviet times…I will not say that everything in the Soviet times was totalitarian, that there was nothing possible. But anyway the way of thinking is such, that I am afraid to say…it is only that way, and that is all." (interview)

This teaching style necessarily influences the (lack of) openness to intercultural methods, stressing interaction and communication, and also any search for multicultural content, which is given a positive value. The point that many teachers are of an older generation was stressed in several interviews (as well as the Basic Positions), and the corollary that a younger generation of teachers, not brought up in the Soviet system, are more open minded and have a more open, more "free" attitude (three interviews) But if some are pleased with the changing approach of the younger teachers, several interviewees worry about the fact that few younger generation pedagogical graduates choose to go into the teaching profession, exacerbating the shortage of teachers. It is clear that this situation is not conducive towards developing multiculturalism or intercultural education as a comprehensive approach.

Several interviewees also stress the point that there is a lack of support in terms of both training and "scientifically developed" teaching materials, and that any development of multicultural content is up to the teacher as an individual. The thought was expressed that multiculturalism is possible in Latvian schools today, that in the abstract schools are encouraged to develop in this direction, but that the process is highly dependent on the schools and individual initiative, continuing the thought of the lack of support and low likelihood that this will take place in any general way:

> "But, in my view, this educational process and the textbooks do not provide the opportunity to put an accent [on multiculturalism or diversity] or to underline at all times that nuance, that nuance of our country, that we are in such an environment, that we have such a society, that we have such a history. And if the teacher does not hold multicultural environment as a value, if he or she does not have such values then he/she will not want to put any emphasis on that." (interview)

There fact that there are courses available for teachers, but depends on the individual teacher signing up for them is also repeated in several interviews.

One comment also adds the human dimension to the position of the elderly teachers, of whom it is expected that they develop new, multicultural approaches:

> "It is no longer a secret that our teacher composition is aging and there is a shortage of teachers, and teachers work with an overload. And up to the moment when these problems will not be solved, while we have so many vacancies as we do, we will not be able to speak of a very good work organisation in schools. These are very heavy questions. Of what great tolerance, of which recognised indicators of educational quality can we speak if the teacher is 70 years old and is forced to work two work loads. These questions tied to the teaching profession, to the number of teachers and the age structure of teachers – these are huge questions. And in this sense, of course, we can characterise the education system in the country as very critical." (interview)

6.2. Teaching the History of Latvia

A question that has gained attention in public discussions in the last couple of years is the issue of whether the history of Latvia should be taught separately, or as an integrated part of world history. Although the discussions amongst professionals and the political decisions have led to the elaboration of a pilot project on the separate teaching of this subject, which is being tested in participating schools in the school year 2006/2007, the question of the future approach remains open. Amongst the interviewees there were opposing views, as well as quite a bit of hesitation on the topic. The separate teaching of the history of Latvia is being championed by nationalist and conservative political parties and groupings, while the integrated approach is more favoured by those who tend to be oriented towards a "European" approach, but the division is not as obvious as this dichotomy seems to indicate.

Even among professional historians, there are divided opinions, which reportedly to some extent reflects also a generational split, where older generation are more for a separate teaching of Latvian history, while younger are for integrated approach. History teachers association studies and recommended integrated approach, but Institute of History took the opposite stance. (interview)

The argument that Latvia as a small country has to take a special approach is expressed in several interviews, but leading to opposite conclusions. The former minister of education says:

> "Here I have to say that it was precisely I who finally introduced history of Latvia as a separate subject matter. So the main thing is already answered. No, I really believe that the History of Latvia should be separated out. That doesn't mean that it should be lifted out and above world history, that it has to be divided off by a steel wall. But, taking into account the specifics of a child's age groups, children are not yet able to analyze and synthesize at the same time. And it is precisely because of methodological reasons that this subject of history of Latvia should be separated out, in order to be aware of it as something separate, is something specific. And why should that be necessary. For small states it is entirely necessary…" (interview)

In contrast, fellow MP Boris Cilēvičs expresses that "as a former systems analyst" he believes that links and interrelations between the small entity and the rest of the system is even more important for a small country like Latvia, which entails that history should be taught within the context of world history. Another interviewee supported an integrated teaching approach by emphasizing the importance of understanding the country's history in the context of what has happened in neighboring countries, and as a part of Europe. One interviewee, with an academic background in history, expressed the thought that teaching national history as separate from world history is even "a dangerous approach" (interview).

Nevertheless, there were several interviewees who expressed hesitation, claiming to understand arguments on both sides, and the "compromise" version of separate classes devoted to Latvian history within a larger history subject was proposed as a reasonable solution.

Once more reflecting the focus on language, a separate sub-question was whether history of Latvia could be taught in another language than Latvian. The more obvious answer that this of course is possible was supported by only a few interviewees. Some gave hesitant answers, either stressing that at least local historical terms would have to be taught in Latvian, since it is necessary to know these in life, or that it would be conceivable to teach the subject *bilingually*. One interviewee clearly favoured teaching of history of Latvia only in Latvian: "I believe that it should be taught in Latvian, clearly. Perhaps the Middle Ages could be taught also in German, because the sources are mainly in German."(interview)

In contrast to this apparently identity-driven approach to language (which seems to imply that it would be impossible for anyone but a perfect Latvian speaker to understand the unique history of Latvia), a Russian-speaking educational practitioner stressed the exact opposite – that it is important to use the language best understood by the pupils, especially if sensitive issues are addressed (as interpretation of history can indeed be in Latvia):

> "…the primary thing is the content. I compensated with language [when I taught, in Russian], because I wanted that the language and historical terms be heard. But this is possible only when children are ready to pick it up. And, I said – on these painful, on those difficult questions, I told those to the children in their native language, so that the child could understand all the nuances." (interview)

There was a question relating to the teaching of history where there was more consensus amongst the interviewed specialists, however – whether the history of Latvia as taught in schools should include also the history of minorities in Latvia. None of the interviewed persons opposed this, but the interpretation of what it should entail still differed, and the answers provide interesting insights into the perception of the diversity in Latvia and the role of the different ethnic groups.

The interviewed ISEC specialist expressed the view that the "national values, those are a people's culture and history, language, traditions, which are positive values…", explaining further that "people" should include all inhabitants, "because looking from a historical perspective, even from a perspective of historical heritage…because our

past heritage does not stay static, it is being formed each year, and we only change somehow. And our opinions also change…." (interview) In her view, the history of minorities is also included in the programmes and in terms of content, but she admits that in practice, the actual teaching of it very much depends on the school and the teacher.

Others express clear support for the idea, emphasizing that the positive contribution of these minorities should be emphasized, or that some minority groups are presently clearly not sufficiently included, as Roma. Others stress the difference between the history of the minorities themselves, as taught to minorities but not necessarily to the majority pupils (as the role of Sweden or Russia to ethnic Russians), versus the contribution and role of the specific minority in the country, which should be taught to all to increase understanding. Another interview stressed the teacher's role in addressing the diversity present amongst pupils in the class, which should be used as an asset in teaching. But a telling twist is the interpretation the former minister of education gives, after responding that the history of minorities is definitely also part of the history of Latvia:

> "Of course, that is part of history of Latvia and I believe it is essential that that should receive great attention when teaching history of Latvia. Because that contains, after all, a large dose of information that is, I would say even very interesting and children would be very eager to learn those. It would be interesting for them to know when Jews came to Latvia, when Roma came and after all, expressing it simply, there are so many Russians here. That is absolutely necessary. And that is one of the best ways to show why our society is the way it is, not avoiding also painful themes." (interview)

The argument comes back to the role of the Latvians and that of other ethnic groups, and the underlying idea that the minorities are "good" if they accept their role and behave as "proper" minorities, who have arrived to the country as invited or – more often – uninvited guests. The inclusion of the history of minorities on the territory of Latvia is thus agreed to by all specialists, but the motivation for this inclusion seems to stem from very different impulses and perceptions of the role of the different ethnic groups in society in the past and, by implication, in the present.

7. Conclusions

The lack of definitions of certain concepts ('multicultural'/'intercultural' education, integration, minorities...) is not unique to Latvia, but is widespread in the 'real' world and in academia. But Latvia also has a post-Soviet legacy with certain specifics in terms of population composition, education system, teacher behavioural patterns, centralism, and arguably, nation-building or re-building processes. Some conclusions can be drawn from the study of 'multicultural' education in Latvia.

In general, the main threat that has emerged during the conduct of this study is the danger of essentialism. Statements, public discussions and even academic discourse seem to often revolve around fundamental and ontological differences between members/bearers of diverse cultures. As such, this is one of the serious challenges to overcome in order to develop multicultural education. If 'multicultural' is understood

as just a means to collect facts, habits, symbols that are supposed to characterize several cultures coexisting within a territory, and present these to children, there is a high risk to "folklorize" them, to depict them by using stereotypes and to give of them a fixed image.

There also appears to be widespread acceptance of the very general idea that speaking a particular language determines the way of thinking, the culture of people, their values and so on. This idea represents an extensive conception of culture that can lead to feed stereotypes and offer justifications, at the extreme, to discriminations. Projects aimed at determining the attitudes towards integration of different groups can produce such results. Another bias of such extensive conception is to reduce individual identities to their 'cultural' dimension, thus ignoring other parts of individual identity (religious, professional, philosophical, associational...).

This tendency can be observed in official as well as academic documents. For instance, *Christian Education: The Curriculum of Basic Education for grades 1-3* states gently that "any culture is based on a certain world outlook, which helps understand the world and live in it" whereas *Latvian Language: Standard for Compulsory Education, grades 1-9* tightly ties language and national culture. According to Margevica and Kopelovica the goal of 'multicultural education' is to render learners "able to accept different opinions and respect representatives of other groups who have different action principles and value systems" (Margevica and Kopelovica, 2003, 3).

This myth of value differences between diverse groups is often openly mentioned as a fact concerning Russian-language and Latvian-language schools and students. Silova and Catlaks consider that these two kinds of schools have different languages, methods of teaching, educators and systems of values. In the interview for this project, one former educator estimates that "...the school's language of instruction has an impact on the formation of personality and the subconscious…in subconscious this component shapes the personality anyway – through literature, language, discussions and holidays celebrated at school."

However, in the interviews concerning education, several discussants drew attention to their view that there are more differences between good Latvian-language schools and weak Latvian-language schools than between Latvian-language and Russian-language ones. These interlocutors thus at least implicitly challenge the argument that establishes a direct link, or even a relation of necessity between a language and a culture. Protassova (2002, 440) notes, referring to Russian communities dispersed throughout several countries, that it is not because people share the same language that they share the same culture. Moreover, it can be added that it is not because people share the same culture (leaving aside the definitions) that they share same values, norms or '(sub)consciousness'. Presenting differences in this way is very risky since it may allow people to infer that some groups are so different that they cannot be integrated.

A second issue of concern is the several layers of reduction that appears in public discourse and policy conceptualisation. 'Multicultural' or 'intercultural' education is frequently presented as national minority education or even simply 'bilingual' education. In addition, in most cases (especially in texts and communications issued

by officials), 'bilingual' education is limited to the learning of Latvian by non-Latvian speakers (meaning Russian-speakers). Arguably, the strong focus on language, and especially the strengthening of Latvian as the top integration priority concern, has created obstacles for adopting a broader multicultural perspective (on comments regarding the over-narrow interpretation of integration in the bilingual education reform, creating the risk of an interpretation as assimilation, see also Silova, 2002, 474-475)

A third conclusion is the excessive, almost exclusive focus, especially amongst politicians, on issues concerning the role and preconditions for inclusion of the Russian-speaking part of population. Apart from the possibility of future discontent of other, especially smaller, minority groups, this tendency also contributes to blocking the development of multiculturalism and addressing other ethnic or religious groups, including newcomers. This conclusion reasserts for the field of education what was also found in the paper on public and policy discourse, where a general, underlying openness to multiculturalism was also found to be sidetracked by the narrowed focus on the "traditional" national minorities, and especially the linguistic, Russian-speaking minority.

Finally, the overview of the educational system and the systemic problems identified both in official documents and in the project interviews clearly indicate the need for a better defined policy, programmes and standards – and even the building of a consensus around the actual goals of education. The development and implementation of systematic reforms will depend on putting more than rhetorical priority on these issues, by assigning the necessary human and financial resources to the task and by improving the conditions of work of the education professionals, including those working at the policy level. Key is therefore mobilisation of political will. Only these commitments to changes in the field of education in general can be hoped to create the conditions necessary for an environment more conducive to the development of a comprehensive and mainstreamed approach to multicultural education.

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